

UN SEEKS RESETTLEMENT OF ROHINGYA REFUGEES

COX'S BAZAR, Bangladesh: The United Nations' refugee agency has asked Bangladesh to allow it to negotiate with the United States, Canada and some European countries to resettle around 1,000 Rohingya Muslims living in the South Asian nation, a senior official at the agency said.

Tens of thousands of Rohingya live in Bangladesh after fleeing Buddhist-majority Myanmar since the early 1990s, and their number has been swelled by an estimated 69,000 escaping an army crackdown in northern Rakhine State in recent months. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) would push for resettlement of those most in need, despite growing resistance in some developed countries, particularly the United States under President Donald Trump, UNHCR's Bangladesh representative, Shinji Kubo, told Reuters yesterday.

"UNHCR will continue to work with the authorities concerned, including in the United States," Kubo said. "Regardless of the change in government or government policies, I think

UNHCR has a clear responsibility to pursue a protection-oriented resettlement program."

Kubo said 1,000 Rohingya refugees had been identified as priorities for resettlement on medical grounds or because they have been separated from their family members living abroad. "Resettlement will always be a challenging thing because only a small number of resettlement opportunities are being allocated by the international community at the moment," Kubo said in an interview. "But it's our job to try to consult with respective countries based on the protection and humanitarian needs of these individuals."

HT Imam, a political adviser to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, said the resettlement proposal was "unrealistic" due to reluctance in the United States and Europe to take further Muslim refugees. Reuters reported this month that officials at an Australian immigration centre in Papua New Guinea were increasing pressure on asylum seekers to return to their home countries voluntarily, including offering large sums of money, amid

fears a deal for the United States to take refugees had fallen through.

Canada, Australia and the United States were the top providers of asylum to Rohingya Muslims who came to Bangladesh from Myanmar before Dhaka stopped the program around 2012. A Bangladesh government official said it was feared the program would encourage more people from Myanmar to use it as a transit country to seek asylum in the West.

Canada has said it would welcome those fleeing persecution, terror and war, after Trump put a four-month hold on allowing refugees from seven Muslim-majority countries into the United States, an order since suspended by a U.S. district judge.

Hoping for access

The UNHCR supports around 34,000 refugees living in two government-registered camps in the Bangladesh coastal district of Cox's Bazar, but a greater number of Rohingya live in makeshift settlements near-

by, unregistered and officially ineligible to receive international aid.

Kubo said he had asked Bangladesh to give the UN access to all the refugees who have recently arrived, adding that UNHCR and other international agencies were also willing to provide aid to poor Bangladeshis living near the refugee settlements to counter local resentment at the influx.

Hasina adviser Imam said providing aid to the new refugees and its citizens was the responsibility of the government. Myanmar said late on Wednesday that a security operation that began after nine police officers were killed in attacks on border security posts on Oct. 9 had now ended.

A report released by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Feb. 3 gave accounts of mass killings and gang rapes by troops during the operation, which it said probably constituted crimes against humanity. Two UN sources have separately told Reuters that more than 1,000 Rohingya may have been killed in the crackdown. —Reuters



This file picture taken on August 4, 2016 shows three orphaned orangutan babies at the International Animal Rescue centre outside the city of Ketapang in West Kalimantan. —AFP

INDONESIAN ORANGUTAN BRUTALLY KILLED, EATEN

THREE MALE WORKERS ARRESTED

JAKARTA: A critically endangered Bornean orangutan has been shot dead, hacked to pieces and eaten by workers after straying onto an Indonesian palm oil plantation, police and activists said yesterday.

Police have formally named three male suspects in the brutal killing in Kapuas Hulu district, in the Indonesian part of Borneo island, while another seven are being questioned as witnesses to the crime. Authorities launched an investigation after media ran stories showing gruesome pictures of the slaughtered ape.

The workers were detained after police found orangutan bones and dried meat in a cupboard at a plantation workers' camp, in a remote part of the jungle-clad island,

local police chief Jukiman Situmorang told AFP. He said the three workers named as suspects stand accused of "shooting, hacking, chopping, cooking and eating the orangutan" on January 27. The men could be jailed for up to five years if found guilty of breaking laws that protect the animals.

Environmental group the Centre for Orangutan Protection (COP) condemned the killing and urged police to target the company that runs the plantation as well as the workers. The head of COP, Hardi Baktiantoro, criticized palm oil companies for introducing rules that see workers punished if there is any damage to plants. This means they view orangutans, who often stray onto plantations accidentally and cause damage, as pests and attack them.

He also said authorities should never have given permission for a plantation in the area: "Why would they give a permit in an area that is an orangutan habitat?"

The rapid expansion of palm oil plantations on Borneo has been blamed for destroying orangutans' natural jungle habitat. They are also attacked by villagers who view them as pests and targeted by poachers to be sold as pets.

The habitat of Bornean orangutans has dwindled by over 50 percent in the past 20 years, and its population has fallen by more than 50 percent over the past 60 years, according to the WWF.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature classifies the animal as critically endangered. —AFP

INDONESIA DIPLOMATS MEET WITH WOMAN ARRESTED IN KIM KILLING

JAKARTA: Indonesian diplomats have met with a woman arrested in Malaysia for suspected involvement in the killing of the North Korean leader's half brother and confirmed she is an Indonesian citizen, officials said yesterday.

Authorities have identified her as Siti Aisyah, 25, originally from Serang in Banten, a province that neighbors the Indonesian capital, Jakarta. She was arrested by Malaysian police early yesterday.

Indonesian Immigration Office spokesman Agung Sampurno said that officials from the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur met with the woman in Selangor state, where she has been imprisoned, and ensured she was safe. "They were allowed to see her but cannot make any questions," said Sampurno. "However, the team can confirm that Aisyah is Indonesian."

He said a passport ID page published by Indonesian media is "the same as the passport held by her."

Lalu Muhammad Iqbal, director of Indonesian Citizen Protection at the Foreign Ministry, said Indonesia would ensure Aisyah's rights are protected and that she has legal assistance. Malaysian police have now arrested two women and one man in the death of Kim Jong Nam, who was reportedly poisoned on Monday by a pair of female assassins as he waited for a flight at the Kuala Lumpur airport.

Malaysian police said the first woman they arrested had Vietnamese travel documents. Vietnamese Foreign Ministry's Deputy Spokeswoman Nguyen Phuong Tra said in a statement that Vietnamese authorities were closely coordinating with Malaysia on the case. Kumparan, an Indonesian news portal, said Aisyah lived in the Tambora neighborhood in western Jakarta for about 10 years before moving to Malaysia in 2013 along with her husband and children. It cited interviews with former neighbors and said she had returned to Indonesia in 2014 to arrange a divorce. —AP

THAI POLICE RAID TEMPLE OF BUDDHIST SECT

PATHUM THANI, Thailand: Thai police raided the head temple of a controversial Buddhist sect yesterday but failed to find and arrest the abbot, who faces criminal charges over accepting \$40 million in embezzled money.

The action followed several earlier failed attempts to seize Phra Dhammajayo, 72, head of the Dhammakaya sect. Police were previously thwarted when crowds of monks and followers blocked the way, risking a violent confrontation. The prime minister of Thailand's military government, Prayuth Chan-ocha, this time invoked an emergency order declaring the area around the temple a temporary "restricted area" to stop people from entering. —AP